

News and Information

From the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs

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**Weekly Column by David McCollum, Director
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Watch for Fraud After a Flood

East Tennesseans recently experienced serious flooding, leaving numerous homes damaged or destroyed. While volunteers and government agencies offered legitimate emergency assistance, scam artists may be seeking to take advantage of homeowners. If you suffer flood damage, hiring a reputable contractor can be the most important step in getting your home back in order.

Avoid contractors who sell their services door-to-door, especially if they claim to have leftover materials from another job nearby. This is a common practice following a natural disaster. These individuals are often scam artists who perform sub-par work and may try to gouge you with hidden costs as well.

Contractors who do major work (over \$25,000) must be licensed. Smaller firms are not required to be licensed, so be sure to talk to friends, relatives, and neighbors who have had quality work performed when you are looking for a contractor. You should also investigate the history of a contractor you think you might hire by contacting the Tennessee Contractor's Board at 1-800-544-7693 or 1-615-741-8307. Get written estimates from at least three firms, and be sure to check their references.

When you have chosen your contractor, be sure that you have read and understood the contract before you sign it. If you have concerns regarding the contract, review it with a trusted friend, family member, or your attorney. Do not sign a contract that contains blanks or requires you to pay for the entire job up-front. Make sure the contract contains a schedule of the work to be done, especially start and completion dates. It should also outline the payment schedule, but you should not make the final payment until the work has been completed to your satisfaction. Always pay with a check or credit card. Never pay with cash.

If you have questions or concerns regarding contractors or any other consumer issue, contact the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at 1-800-342-8385 or visit www.state.tn.us/consumer.